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Classified By: Ambassador Charles P. Ries for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Greek Government has decided to send two naval vessels and a military divers unit to participate in peacekeeping operations in Lebanon. For now, however, the GOG has ruled out sending ground forces. MOD officials have stressed to us the suitability of the Souda Bay facilities in Crete and the training facilities in northern Greece to provide training and support. Main opposition PASOK criticized the GOG for the "haste" of its decision -- particularly before the rules of engagement have been clarified -- but avoided condemning the substance of the decision. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) On Tuesday August 22, the Greek Government Committee on Defense and Foreign Affairs (KYSEA) unanimously approved sending two Naval vessels and a commando divers unit to participate in peacekeeping operations for Lebanon. Announcing the decision, Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis and Defense Minister Vangelis Meimarakis said a Navy frigate with its helicopter and a commando divers unit would participate in sea control operations off Lebanon. The frigate is expected to patrol coastal waters and conduct inspections of ships attempting to reach Lebanese ports in coordination with UN command authorities. A Navy amphibious landing ship, operating out of Cyprus, would be available to transport humanitarian aid from Cyprus to Lebanon.

[1](#)3. (U) Additionally, the decision affirmed that Greece would provide six Greek military officers, two from each of the service branches, to the UN force's command staff. It added that the GOG would also consider sending other units in the future once the situation had been stabilized, but for now has ruled out sending Greek ground troops to the area.

[1](#)4. (C) The KYSEA decision, as expected, focused on Greece's naval contribution. Greek Chief of Defense (CHOD) Admiral Panyiotis Chinofotis told DATT last week that the Greek military was already "thinly stretched" with more than 1,200 troops abroad in various peacekeeping missions. Nevertheless, at the time Chinofotis raised the possibility that Greece might later be in a position to provide "technical support teams," such as medical or engineering troops, for humanitarian reconstruction efforts in and south of Beirut. Yesterday's KYSEA decision, however, made no reference to such teams.

[1](#)5. (C) Nor did the KYSEA decision mention the possible use of Greek infrastructure. In comments to DATT, CHOD Chinofotis

and other MOD officials have stressed the suitability of the Souda Bay facilities in Crete to support the UN military operation. Greek military officials have also offered the Peacekeeping Operations Training Center in Kilkis (northern Greece) as a possible location for training international staff and foreign military units. The GOG may plan to make a formal offer of these facilities at a later date.

16. (C) Predictably, main Greek opposition PASOK has criticized the GOG for its "haste" in making the decision decision to support the UN mission -- particularly before the rules of engagement have been clarified. But PASOK avoided outright condemnation of the substance of the government's decision.

17. (C) COMMENT: Greece's decision to provide naval support to the UNIFIL mission comes on the eve of Greece's assumption of the UN Security Council Presidency and indicates Greek awareness of the importance of standing up to the plate on a high-profile issue. At the same time, the reluctance of the GOG to commit ground forces for the time being -- a position similar to the one Greece took earlier regarding Afghanistan before ultimately sending troops -- reflects a sensitivity to domestic public opinion (which has been very critical of Israel), particularly in light of upcoming local elections in October. Embassy will continue to emphasize the importance of "boots on the ground," given the trend among other contributors to pledge naval assets.

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